LOCAL PLAN BUDGET PROPOSAL

Item HP 25/8 referred from Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee of 12 February 2025

Following the publication of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 12 December 2024, work had been undertaken to understand the budget requirements to deliver a Local Plan. The report set out the estimated costs for local plan production up to Local Plan adoption (end of 2027/28).

After careful consideration of the evidence base studies, Members recognised the importance of progressing the green belt extension feasibility study at West Malling and the Green Gap study, and they also considered and supported undertaking an extended green belt extension feasibility study for an additional piece of land up to the railway line and Wateringbury Road, East Malling, while acknowledging a very high bar would need to be met for a green belt extension to be endorsed at Local Plan examinations.

In addition, while recognising that Design Code remained a requirement under the revised NPPF, Members supported not progressing a Borough wide Design Code requiring a budget of £260,000 within the current Local Plan budgetary period given that Design Code work was not programmed until post Local Plan submission and adoption, there was uncertainty as to what a design code would be required to entail and the uncertainty around devolution and local government reorganisation. It was also noted that the identification of parking standards for the borough was not due to progress until much later in the plan-marking process. However, it was recognised that this was an important area of work and would be progressed alongside any future design-code work once the Local Plan was further developed. Therefore, the Committee was invited to note that the need for further financial provision, including that relating to a future Borough-wide Design Code / Parking standards, would need to be considered alongside other competing budget demands for the Council as part of the future budget setting process for the Council and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

RECOMMENDED:* That

(1) the additional pressure on the Borough Council's overall budget as a result of the requirements to deliver a new Local Plan, in accordance with the revised National Planning Policy Framework, and a consequential shortfall in the Planning reserve from 2026/27, be noted:

(2) the following evidence base studies be progressed:

a. Green Belt extension at West Malling (£30K)
b. Green Gap study (£15K)

(3) the budget requirement of £260,000 to progress a Borough-wide Design Code not be progressed within the current Local Plan budgetary period; and

(4) the additional budget requirements of the Local Plan as set out in Table 3, and in addition the budget requirements for a Green Gap Study (£15k) and a Green Belt Extension Study (£30k), as well as an additional budget to progress an additional piece of land in the Green Belt Extension Study up to the railway line and Wateringbury Road, East Malling at an additional estimated cost of approximately £50-£70k, be approved.

***Recommended to Cabinet**